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# THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER

APRIL 1913

## EDUCATIONAL NEWS AND EDITORIAL COMMENT

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The most important educational gathering of the year is the winter meeting of the Department of Superintendence and its affiliated organizations which assembled in Philadelphia during the last week of February. Among the affiliated organizations were the National Council, the Society of College Teachers of Education, the National Society for the Study of Education, the International Kindergarten Association, and a half-dozen other national societies and general committees. The discussions of these various bodies cannot be reported here. Two general comments on the significance of this meeting apply to all of the organizations.

**The Department of Superintendence** First, this winter meeting has clearly outstripped all other meetings in importance. The summer meeting of the association does not bring together as representative or influential a group of educators as does this meeting. The committees which report at this meeting are also of greater significance and influence in the aggregate than are the committees which report at the summer meeting. The total registration at Philadelphia was over 2,500 and there were a great many in attendance who were not formal members of the association.

Second, the very striking emphasis in all of the meetings on discussions of a scientific type marks a great advance upon the informal, inspirational programs of a few years ago. Here and there a voice was raised in protest against the effort to measure educa-

tional products, but in the main there was the most cordial sympathy with scientific studies of every type. Even the protests were encouraging, both because they warn the scientific worker of the necessity of caution against overhasty generalization and also because they show that even the reluctant are beginning to realize that the era of exact evaluations in education has arrived.

Official announcement was made at the Philadelphia meeting that the National Education Association will be held in Salt Lake City from July 7 to July 11. The general plan which **Summer Meeting of the N. E. A.** is in view for the association is an eastern meeting in 1914 and a meeting in California in connection with the Panama Exposition in 1915.

The Upper Peninsular Educational Association of Michigan established at its last meeting in October a bureau of research.

**A Co-operative School Survey** The purpose of this bureau is to make an educational survey of the district covered by the association. The bureau has issued two elaborate blanks on which it seeks to secure information, first, from the superintendent or county commissioner, and second, from the individual teacher.

The blank addressed to superintendents and commissioners makes inquiry with regard to the buildings and their janitorial care; with regard to the course of study, emphasizing especially the newer subjects, as manual training, trade training, science, agriculture, etc. Third, questions are raised with regard to consolidation of schools, medical and physical inspection, and scientific tests undertaken to determine the success of instruction. Finally, a financial statement is requested.

The blank addressed to the teacher seeks to get together, first, information with regard to the teacher's own training and experience; second, with regard to the number and characteristics of students; third, with regard to all of the subjects of instruction in the school and the methods and equipment for the presenting of these subjects. The blanks are very suggestive and will be of assistance to anyone who is attempting a similar co-operative survey of a large district.

The example of this association in attempting through a co-operative committee to give the association a perfectly definite problem and at the same time to secure results that will be of large general interest cannot be too highly commended. The trouble with most educational associations is that they have no definite end in view and consequently waste the time and energy of those in attendance. The local school situation is undoubtedly the most important subject for consideration of any association, and the stimulus and training which will come to all members of the association from an investigation of such topics as those mentioned will be one very important outcome of the work of the committee.

A good example of the difficulties that arise from the type of school inquiries which are now possible is to be found in the recent **The Wisconsin Rural School Survey** action of the County Superintendents Association held in Madison, Wis. It will be remembered that a report on the conditions of Wisconsin rural schools was made by the State Board of Public Affairs. The county superintendents at their meeting expressed the view that the investigation was made by men who were novices in the work of education. These men, it is asserted, know nothing of country schools and country-school conditions. They worked in less than one-half the counties in the state and in many of these counties their visits were extremely brief.

It is not the purpose of the present editorial to attempt to decide whether the criticisms of the inquiry are valid or not. The point which is to be emphasized is that school inquiries if they are to be of the highest advantage must be carried on systematically and must be broad and complete enough to command the respect of the community. The report which was issued on Wisconsin rural schools has not, as a matter of fact, led to desirable legislation during the present session of the Wisconsin legislature. It has aroused much antagonism; and as indicated by the references made above to the association of county superintendents, it has failed to serve as a constructive basis for the improvement of Wisconsin education.

An interesting situation and one that is very significant for school people has arisen in the state of Ohio. The governor and the legislature are fully convinced that the public schools of that state, especially the rural schools, are inefficient. They are therefore organizing a careful inquiry to ascertain just how inefficient their schools are.

**The Ohio  
School Survey**

The following extract from the *Columbus Journal* of March 1 sets forth clearly the attitude of that journal toward the proposed school survey:

The act of the legislature providing for a school survey may be regarded as radical legislation. And such it is, if it is carried out in the spirit that the situation demands. The school system of this state does not enjoy the full confidence of the people. It is manned and womaned by talent sufficient to make it a success; but there is something the matter with the system, with the way things are done, and with the theories that underlie that system.

To secure the modifications needed, and to put the schools upon a plane of greater efficiency, is the purpose of this act. To secure this, the personnel of that committee should be the first and most important thing to consider. What is wanted is a new departure, an essential change in the doctrine governing common-school education. We are not going to secure this by the sway of reactionary ideas, or under the advice of men who are satisfied with the *status quo*. There should be no inbreeding in the formulation of the new plans. We have had enough of the promulgation of the old theories of public instruction and now we need some men who are prepared with new and advanced ideas.

This whole project is a part of the progressive tendency of the age, at the bottom of which is the exaltation of humanity instead of the promotion of professionalism and the old régime.

About a year ago attention was called in this journal to the fact that the immediate predecessors of the present Ohio legislature had so reduced the available public funds of the state that the schools of Ohio were in serious danger of suffering beyond the point of public endurance. When this fact is recalled in connection with the present provision for an inquiry, one wonders whether the legislature will succeed in getting at the real causes of deficiency in the Ohio schools through the agencies which will be employed for the conduct of this inquiry. There can be no question whatever that Ohio rural schools, like all other schools, are defective. There can be no question at all that any investigation

committee will discover some of these defects. Are the educational people going to be satisfied to allow legislators thus to criticize the work of the schools without in turn drawing attention pointedly to the external influences which are continually operating to handicap the teacher and the school supervisor? There ought to be somewhere in the educational world an agency which would anticipate any governor and legislature by pointing out both the defects and the virtues of schools and the extent to which former legislation in the given state has interfered with the operations of the schools. Perhaps the inquiry which is to be made will bring out these facts, but there is great danger, as indicated by some of the inquiries which have already been made, that the real causes of the difficulty will not come to the surface.

The committee of the National Council on Standards and Tests of Efficiency of Schools and Systems of Schools rendered a report through its chairman, Professor Strayer, summarizing the work which has been done up to this time in the different parts of the country in standardizing various subjects and types of organization.

In connection with this report there was a vigorous discussion of the desirability of attempting to standardize the work of schools. There can be no doubt that many members of the council are skeptical as to the possibilities of measuring some of the most important products of school work. On the other hand, those who were in attendance were evidently keenly aware of the fact that school surveys and inquiries are rapidly increasing in number and influence. They were also aware that there must be some constituted educational commission which can undertake in an authoritative way to offer advice to those who are launching upon such inquiries. The committee recommended that its membership be enlarged in such a way that it should represent the most significant scholarship and best administrative practice known to the profession. The functions of this committee were then defined in the report which follows:

1. To encourage those who are engaged in the derivation of scales or units of measurement or in the application of such units to schools or systems

of schools for the sake of establishing standards which may be commonly accepted.

2. That this committee should be made known to the profession as a body ready to give advice or counsel with respect to the nature and scope of school surveys, investigations, or inquiries.

3. That on occasion this committee might be expected to respond to the request of those engaged in the administration of public education for significant help in the organization of a scientific and professional evaluation of the accomplishment of any school or system of schools. This third function can be exercised only when the work of this committee has been sufficiently well established to create the belief in the public mind that our profession is, through its accredited representatives, willing and able to pass in judgment upon the accomplishment of any one of its members. Any such action as is contemplated in this suggestion will, of course, require considerable financial support as well as professional zeal.

In keeping with the general skepticism about measurements, there was some opposition to this committee. Furthermore, there was some opposition on the ground that it would be assumed in some quarters that this committee had arbitrary and wholly artificial powers. It was feared that so small a collection of educators could hardly represent the general profession. The answer to these objections which was offered and accepted by the council was that the committee was not intended to be a court of final resort, but rather an organizing commission which should bring together information and agencies which can be of use in educational inquiries in any part of the country. It is not intended that this committee shall perform through its present membership all of the work which the council has in view. It is intended rather that this committee shall be a center around which activities of this type shall be focused.

The enlarged committee consists of the following persons: Dr. George D. Strayer, chairman, Superintendent William H. Maxwell, Superintendent James H. Van Sickle, Dr. Edward L. Thorndike, Professor E. P. Cubberley, Professor Edward C. Elliott, Professor Paul Hanus, Professor Charles H. Judd, Hon. Calvin N. Kendall, Miss Adelaide Steele Baylor, Hon. Ben Blewett, Mrs. Ella Flag Young, Hon. John H. Phillips, Miss Katherine D. Blake, Superintendent Frank Spalding.

Two important items of educational news come from New York City. First, the reports of Professor Hanus' committee are appearing in rapid succession. A short section of Professor Hanus' personal report appears with each report by an expert. These documents contain much material that is of universal interest, as well as the description and discussions of New York conditions. In due time each report will be reviewed. In the meantime it is to be noted that New York teachers are making a careful study of the reports and all the other interested parties are being heard at great length on each report. The following article from the *New York Globe* indicates in some detail what is going on:

Through representatives of their various associations, united in a central council, principals and teachers in the local schools have begun a thorough, exhaustive, and impartial study of the reports so far announced by the Committee on School Inquiry of the Board of Estimate. At the meeting of the council yesterday some twenty of the associations were represented, and good progress was made in outlining plans for the study contemplated. It was the prevailing opinion that steps should be taken to increase the representation of teachers, and the Executive Committee was authorized to present a plan to the next meeting.

Upon the recommendation of the central committee it was agreed that all of the reports, including those on the business side, should be studied, and that the report of the Committee on Studies of the Board of Education ought to be included. The scope of the reports was considered, and it was decided that they should not be exhaustive treatises, but clear, concise statements as to the recommendations approved or disapproved, and the reasons therefor. Latitude was given to the committees to report plans where plans suggested by the experts in their reports are not agreed to as outlined.

Our second item of important educational news from New York City refers to certain bills which are before the legislature in Albany to transfer to the Board of Education powers which now belong to the superintendent. The whole matter is so clearly and justly presented in an editorial in the *Evening Post* of February 27 that the statement of the situation may be repeated in the terms of that editorial:

#### CHAOS IN THE SCHOOLS

It cannot too soon or too sharply be said that the bills pending at Albany to amend the city charter in matters vitally affecting the public schools are



thoroughly mischievous. The fact that the Board of Education yesterday gave its approval to these measures does not disprove this. It rather confirms it. For the plain truth is that an attempt is being made to do indirectly and piecemeal what last year it was sought to do directly and wholesale. The Gaynor charter of 1912, with its rash tearing-up of the whole school system, met such strong opposition on the part of skilled educators and intelligent friends of the schools, that it had to be dropped. But now some of the same things are to be compassed by means of a series of pop-gun bills. In favor of them, as Dr. Abraham Flexner asserts in a letter to the *Times*, "no single educator of standing can be quoted." They fly in the face of experience and of the best knowledge we have. With the reports on our school methods just obtained from experts by the city, they are in flat contradiction.

Let us take, for example, Assembly bill No. 1212. It would give to the Board of Education the power to "change the grades of all schools," and to "adopt and modify courses of study for all schools." The board can do that now, it is said. Yes, but only "upon the written recommendation of the Board of Superintendents." Those words are in the present law. They are stricken out by the bill. What would be the result? Why, that special knowledge and practical knowledge would be thrown out of the window, and that any member of the Board of Education who had energy enough and log-rolling cleverness enough could cause sweeping changes to be made in the grades and the courses of study, over the protests of the superintendents, and though the alterations might be born of ignorance or prejudice. Now, this is to stand the whole school system on its head. It would employ experts, but hamstring them. As Dr. Flexner states the case with authority: "The unbroken experience of every American city conclusively demonstrates that nothing but disaster results when duties belonging to trained educational experts are transferred to or usurped by a Board of Education, or any of its officers."

Two other bills are almost equally objectionable. One of them calls for the appointment of three additional district superintendents. Whether they are needed or not, we cannot say. But it is ominous that they are to be appointed, not, as now, "upon the nomination of the Board of Superintendents," but direct by the Board of Education. And there is in the same bill a provision that directors of special branches shall be taken from the supervision of the city superintendent and be under no authority but that of the Board of Education. This is a fine touch of chaos. Another one is to be found in Assembly bill No. 1214, which provides that "the president of the board shall have power to designate any member of the supervising or teaching staff to inspect and report upon any subject of which the board has cognizance or over which it has legal control." This may sound very innocent, but what does it imply? Why, that subordinates are to sit in judgment on their superiors. A district superintendent might undertake to pass upon the work of the city superintendent. A teacher would "inspect and report upon" her principal. Was there ever such a topsy-turvy scheme?

If it is a question of investigating the schools, what more do the board and the legislature want than the exhaustive inquiry carried on for two years by Professor Hanus and his corps of able assistants? The results of their patient labors have been coming from the press. But they might as well never have been printed if the haphazard and upheaving policy now indorsed by the Board of Education is to be put into force. Why invite the judgment of experts if it is at once to be flouted? Why go to great expense to get competent investigators if their conclusions are to be contemptuously ignored? On the whole matter of the functions of superintendents, the board has before it a particularly vigorous and suggestive report by Professor Edward C. Elliott, of Wisconsin University. One of his strongest pleas is that the superintendents should be set free from clerical labor so that they may do with full energy the vital work of overseeing instruction, fixing grades, changing courses of study. But these last duties are the very ones which the Board of Education would take away from them, while not lifting a finger to relieve them from the deadening routine of vast masses of correspondence and detailed reports. The force of ignorant audacity could scarcely go farther.

It is a time for protest and a time for action. The legislature and the governor should be given to understand that sappers and miners cannot be allowed to work in the dark beneath our educational structure. If reforms and reconstructions are necessary, they must be undertaken in the light of day and by hands fitted for the work. Certainly, the happy-go-lucky and subversive methods light-heartedly indorsed by the Board of Education deserve the severest condemnation.

The employment of school nurses is becoming a regular part of school organization. It is so common that it hardly constitutes a new item to call attention to the employment of a school nurse in any given community. In order that a record may be made of the steady growth of this movement, however, it is well to note from time to time such items as the following from the *Journal* of Marquette, Michigan:

Recognizing its responsibility in planning for a healthier Menominee, the board of education of that city has decided to appropriate funds for the employment of a visiting school nurse to be a member of the city's corps of instructors. The acquisition of a health pedagogue has long been considered by the board and its action now is considered an important step in the direction of civic advancement. While not altogether an innovation, the cities of Menominee's population supplied with visiting nurses are not many. Cities fortified with visiting nurses have found their services invaluable and many cases are cited where outbreaks of contagious diseases have been frustrated. The duties as outlined for the nurse will be instruction of the children in health matters generally, the care of pupils in ill health, and instruction in hygiene. The

selection of a person to occupy the new position has been delegated to Superintendent of Schools Davis.

This item could undoubtedly be duplicated from week to week from various parts of the country. It is a clear indication of the gradual and widespread development of a better medical inspection and management of public schools.

The City Teachers' College of St. Louis is performing a large service for the schools of that city. In the first place, it trains **Teachers' Courses in St. Louis** the teachers who are to go into the elementary schools from year to year. In the second place, it conducts under the name **Extension Work** a number of classes for teachers in active service. In the third place, it provides in a Saturday morning class conducted by Dr. Withers, head of the Teachers' College, an agency for scientific study of the St. Louis system. This Saturday morning class is attended regularly by a body of principals and supervisors and is pursuing a series of important studies. For example, studies are being made by reference to the individual records of children in the schools of the exact number of days which a child spends in each grade. This study is of great significance, first, because it recognizes the only legitimate basis for studies of retardation in actual attendance, and second, because the St. Louis school system has a method of securing acceleration in a relatively large number of cases. The work of the schools is organized in short quarters. Certain of these quarters are devoted in larger measure to reviews. Bright children and children who are well advanced in the work are allowed to omit the review quarters. This method of securing acceleration would invalidate all conclusions drawn from general statistics. Hence the special importance of the type of study which is being made.

This one example serves to show what a group of students of education can undertake when properly organized and encouraged. The example of the St. Louis Board of Education in organizing courses for teachers in service and thus keeping alive interests that will reflect themselves in the schools is worthy of wide recognition and imitation.